

moving, and it will tend toward hope or tend toward tragedy. Our terrorist enemies have a vision that guides and explains all their varied acts of murder. They seek to impose Taliban-like rule, country by country, across the greater Middle East. They seek the total control of every person and mind and soul, a harsh society in which women are voiceless and brutalized. They seek bases of operation to train more killers and export more violence. They commit dramatic acts of murder to shock, frighten, and demoralize civilized nations, hoping we will retreat from the world and give them free rein. They seek weapons of mass destruction to impose their will through blackmail and catastrophic attacks. None of this is the expression of a religion. It is a totalitarian political ideology, pursued with consuming zeal and without conscience.

Our actions too are guided by a vision. We believe that freedom can advance and change lives in the greater Middle East as it has advanced and changed lives in Asia and Latin America and Eastern Europe and Africa. We believe it is a tragedy of history that in the Middle East, which gave the world great gifts of law and science and faith, so many have been held back by lawless tyranny and fanaticism. We believe that when all Middle Eastern peoples are finally allowed to live and think and work and worship as free men and women, they will reclaim the greatness of their own heritage. And when that day comes, the bitterness and burning hatreds that feed terrorism will fade and die away. America and all the world will be safer when hope has returned to the Middle East.

These two visions—one of tyranny and murder, the other of liberty and life—clashed in Afghanistan. And thanks to brave U.S. and coalition forces and to Afghan patriots, the nightmare of the Taliban is over, and that nation is coming to life again. These two visions have now met in Iraq and are contending for the future of that country. The failure of freedom would only mark the beginning of peril and violence. But my fellow Americans, we will not fail. We will persevere and defeat this enemy and hold this hard-won ground for the realm of liberty.

May God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. in the Thorpe Hall gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to American hostage Nicholas Berg, who was killed in Iraq in early May by senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General; Aladin Abd al-Sahib al-Alwan, Iraqi Minister of Education; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraq Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq that began in early April; James A. Baker III, the President's personal envoy on the issue of Iraqi debt; and Carina Perelli, Director, United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, who heads the United Nations electoral mission to Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Iraqis Receiving Medical Care and an Exchange With Reporters

May 25, 2004

The President. I'm honored to shake the hand of a brave Iraqi citizen who had his hand cut off by Saddam Hussein. I'm with six other Iraqi citizens as well who suffered the same fate. They are examples of the brutality of the tyrant.

I am also here with Marvin Zindler of Houston, Texas. I appreciate Joe Agris, the doctor who helped put these hands on these men; Don North, the documentary producer who made a film of this brutality, which brought the plight of these gentlemen to the attention of Marvin and his foundation. These men had hands restored because of the generosity and love of an American citizen, and I am so proud to welcome them to the Oval Office.

I assured them we have a plan to help Iraq achieve free elections. We'll transfer full sovereignty. They were pleased to hear that America will stay and help with security. We will continue to work on reconstruction matters. I assured them I will continue to ask the world to help. And they want to vote. They want to have elections, and they're going back to Iraq soon, and we're so proud to have them here in the Oval Office.

Again, thank you, sir, for coming.

Mr. Kadim. Thank you very much.

The President. I appreciate you. Thank you. Please be seated, and I'll answer a couple of questions.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez

Q. Mr. President, can you say why General Sanchez is being replaced as the top commander in Iraq? Is that in any way related to the prisoner abuse scandal? And who is going to replace him?

The President. Rick Sanchez has done a fabulous job. He's been there for a long time. His service has been exemplary, and the Defense Department will add further comments to it.

Mike [Mike Emmanuel, FOX News], welcome. It's good to see you.

Transfer of Sovereignty in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, Chirac's office is quoted as saying that President Chirac told you that the transfer of power has to be real.

The President. Yes.

Q. Can you describe what you may have said to him to reassure him that the transfer of power would be real?

The President. Yes, what President Chirac and others have said is they want to make sure that the transfer of sovereignty to the interim government is a real transfer. And that's what we want. We want there to be a complete and real transfer of sovereignty so that the Iraqi citizens realize the fate of their country is now their responsibility. And we'll be there to help, and we'll help in a variety of ways. We'll help by making sure our security forces are there to work with their security forces. We'll help to make sure the reconstruction money we have set aside is well spent. We'll help by getting—to continue to work with other countries to help aid a free Iraq. We'll do what we need to do to help the interim government succeed in getting to the period of free elections. And I had a great conversation with President Chirac. We share the same goal, a free and stable and peaceful Iraq.

Yes, Dick [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

Q. Mr. President, looking forward a bit to the elections that you'd like to see in Iraq, is it imperative for Iraq to end up with a

democracy? Or are free elections enough to satisfy your aims at this point?

The President. What's imperative is that the Iraqi citizens develop a constitution that they can call their own, a constitution written and approved by Iraqis. As I said last night, our intention was never to have Iraq look like America. Our intention is for Iraq to be free and stable and whole, at peace with its neighbors.

A free Iraq will help change the history of the greater Middle East. A free Iraq will show the rest of the world that when people are given a chance to raise their families in peace and security, a civil society that's stable and hopeful will develop, and that's what we want. We want a society where the men who've suffered so much because of the whims of one brutal man—where their children can grow up and realize their full potential, where the schools work, where the health care system is good. And there's no doubt in my mind that Iraq can achieve this great dream and vision. And there's no doubt in my mind, some day their children will come to America and say, "Thank goodness America stood the line and was strong and did not falter in the face of the violence of a few."

Listen, thank you all for coming. I'm proud to have you here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Marvin Zindler, member, board of directors, and Joseph Agris, chief executive officer and founder, Agris-Zindler Children's Fund; and Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, USA, commander, Coalition Joint Task Force Seven.

Remarks in a Discussion at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio

May 25, 2004

The President. Well, thank you, Ron. Thanks. Listen, thanks for coming. As you can see, I'm joined by some of your fellow citizens here to have a dialog about health care. And there's some really amazing things going on in the Youngstown area as well as across the country to make sure people have got a safety net. And that's what we're going